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June 17, 2022

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide, we write to urge opposition to the “Save Our Sequoias Act” by Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and Representative Scott Peters (D-CA). Protecting the iconic Giant Sequoias is an important goal, but this legislation would weaken existing environmental law to expedite potentially harmful logging projects that undermine the ecological integrity of sequoia groves and will do nothing to protect these trees. The legislation is a misguided step in the wrong direction that would remove science and community input from decision-making and would severely undercut bedrock environmental laws, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Some provisions in the bill could actually exacerbate the threat to the Giant Sequoias and our forests. Despite its local focus, this bill sets a bad precedent and could have far-reaching effects across the country.

Our primary objections are to Section 6(a)(2), which would waive environmental laws under a broad so-called “emergency.” These seminal environmental laws protect communities (especially front-line communities), wildlife, lands, and clean water. The bill would remove the NEPA process for decision-making on management activities and would instead place those decisions into the hands of a “Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition,” which does not have to abide by standard transparency requirements afforded by the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The legislation would prevent the voices of community members, scientists, and others from being heard. This legislation would lead to rushed and poorly planned logging projects with major impacts on soil, streams, and wildlife that could result in increased wildfire risk and harm recreational opportunities and other uses. Smart planning and public engagement

as required by NEPA are integral to success, not a barrier to success. This is especially important when addressing an iconic forest species such as the Giant Sequoias.

The bill would similarly bypass the ESA. In the same section, the bill would waive consultations that ensure proposed projects do not drive species toward extinction. This decision-making process is critical to protect threatened and endangered species. The ESA waiver contradicts the stated intent of this bill, and would make it more likely to harm imperiled species than to help them.

The legislation also creates a new “categorical exclusion” that must be used by federal land managers to implement the provisions of the law, but the Forest Service and National Park Service (NPS) already have an extensive number of authorities and categorical exclusions to complete this type of work. There is no evidence to suggest that needed ecological restoration cannot and does not advance in the absence of yet another categorical exclusion.

Finally, although coordination among agencies and decision makers is important, the coordination provisions in this legislation are unnecessary because the Forest Service and NPS already have authority to complete the actions envisioned by the legislation under existing coordination authorities and requirements. This coordination also must occur in the public eye, but the legislation would exempt the workings of the Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition from Open Government laws such as the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Giant Sequoias are often in NPS or other conservation-managed lands and are one of the most fire-adapted species on earth. The fact that these trees are experiencing such high mortality is directly related to climate change and fire suppression, and there is already active management occurring on these lands. We encourage you to protect our forests, protect science and community input, and oppose this highly problematic legislation.

Sincerely,

League of Conservation Voters
Earthjustice
Defenders of Wildlife
Sierra Club
GreenLatinos
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Parks Conservation Association
Center for Biological Diversity
Hispanic Access Foundation
Environment America
Western Environmental Law Center
WildEarth Guardians
Food & Water Watch
Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network
Greenpeace USA
California Wilderness Coalition
Environment California
Sierra Forest Legacy
Pacific Crest Trail Association
Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology

The Forest Advocate
Friends of the Earth US
350Merced
Environmental Protection Information Center-EPIC
Pacific Environment
Resource Renewal Institute
Friends of the Inyo
Extinction Rebellion San Francisco Bay Area
Santa Barbara Standing Rock Coalition
Los Padres ForestWatch
Stand.earth
Association of Young Americans
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Ocean Conservation Research
Palms to Pines Democratic Network
Protect All Children's Environment
Waterway Advocates
Quaker Earthcare Witness
Wild Heritage
Conservation Northwest
Klamath Forest Alliance
Friends of the Bitterroot
Fox Valley Citizens for Peace & Justice
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